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### Psalm 103

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# Psalm 103— Logotechnical Analysis

## Guidelines

- Please read the [General Introduction](#) as well as the Introduction to [Book I](#) and [Book IV](#).
- For common features found in the numerical analysis charts, see the [Key to the charts](#).

## Specific features of Psalm 103

- In terms of material content, the psalm divides into two distinct parts, defined by God's praiseworthy actions **on earth** (1-10) and his actions **from his heavenly throne** (11-22). The first part, Canto I (vs. 1-10), is significantly made up of exactly **68** (4 x **17**) words.
- In conformity with all psalms so far in Book IV, Psalm 103 has its meaningful centre on the level of the poetical building blocks. In this case, it is the two middle verselines, supported by the middle colon and the two middle words: **vs. 11-12**. It is about God's readiness and willingness - ascribable to his everlasting love - to forgive iniquities.
- In order to emphasize the abundance of God's steadfast love, the author made use of the number **7** in different ways to symbolically express fullness.

## Strophic structure - Canto/Stanza boundary: || Canticle boundary: |

- Van der Lugt: 1-2, 3-5 | 6-7, 8-9 || 10-11, 12-14 | 15-16, 17-18 || 19-20, 21-22 (3 cantos with 10 strophes, 22 verselines and 47 cola).
- Fokkelman: 1-2, 3-5, 6-8 || 9-10, 11-13, 14-16 || 17-19, 20-22 (3 stanzas with 8 strophes, 23 verselines and 47 cola, taking v. 22c, mistakenly, as a separate verseline).
- Labuschagne: 1-2, 3-5 | 6-7, 8-10 || 11-12, 13-14 | 15-16, 17-18 || 19-20, 21-22 (3 cantos with 10 strophes, 22 verselines and 47 cola).

## Logotechnical analysis

- Columns **a** and **b** show the number of words before and after the atnach.
- Column **c**: praise God for what he does **on earth**; **d**: and for what he does **from heaven**.
- The numbering of the verselines is shown in **brown**.

		Total	a	b	c	d
1	לְדוֹד Heading	1	1	0		
	Device for inclusion בָּרַכִּי נַפְשִׁי אֶת־יְהוָה	1	4		4	
	Compare v. 22a וְכָל־קִרְבִּי אֶת־שֵׁם קְדֹשׁוֹ:	5		5	5	
2	בָּרַכִּי נַפְשִׁי אֶת־יְהוָה	2	4		4	
	וְאֵל־תִּשְׁבְּחִי כָל־גְּמוּלָיו:	4		4	4	
	Strophe 1 Total, v. 1-2	17	= 8	+ 9	= 17	+ 0
3	הִסְלַח לְכָל־עֲוֹנוֹכִי	3	3		3	
	הֲרַפָּא לְכָל־תַּחֲלָאִיכִי:	3		3	3	
4	הַגְּזֵאל מִשְׁחַת חַיִּיכִי	4	3		3	
	הַמַּעֲטִירִי חֶסֶד וְרַחֲמִים:	3		3	3	
5	הַמְשַׁבֵּיעַ בְּטוֹב עֵדֶיךָ	5	3		3	
	תַּתְּחַדֵּשׁ כְּנֶשֶׁךְ נַעֲוִירִיכִי:	3		3	3	
	Total, v. 2-5	26	= 13	+ 13	= 26	+ 0
	Numerical Strophe 1 Total, v. 1-2	17	= 8	+ 9	= 17	+ 0
	Chiasmus Strophe 2 Total, v. 3-5	18	= 9	+ 9	= 18	+ 0
	Canticle I.1 Total, v. 1-5	35	= 17	+ 18	= 35	+ 0

6	עֲשֵׂה צְדָקוֹת יְהוָה <sup>^</sup>	6	3	3	3
	וּמִשְׁפָּטִים לְכָל־עֲשׂוּקִים:		3		3
7	יֹדִיעַ דְּרָכָיו לְמַשְׁחָה <sup>^</sup>	7	3	3	3
	לְבָנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל עַל־לִוְתָיו:		3	3	3
	Strophe 3	Total, v. 6-7	12	= 6 + 6	= 12 + 0
8	רַחֲמִים וְחַנוּן יְהוָה <sup>^</sup>	8	3	3	3
	אֶרֶךְ אַפִּים וְרַב־חֶסֶד:		4		4
9	לֹא־לִנְצַח יִרְיָב <sup>^</sup>	9	3	3	3
	וְלֹא לְעוֹלָם יִטּוֹר:		3		3
10	לֹא כַחֲטָאֵינוּ עָשָׂה לָנוּ <sup>^</sup>	10	4	4	4
	וְלֹא כַעֲוֹנוֹתֵינוּ גָּמַל עָלֵינוּ:		4		4
	Strophe 4	Total, v. 8-10	21	= 10 + 11	= 21 + 0
	Numerical Chiasmus Canticle I.1	Total, v. 1-5	35	= 17 + 18	= 35 + 0
	Canticle I.2	Total, v. 6-10	33	= 16 + 17	= 33 + 0
	Canto I	Total, v. 1-10	68	= 33 + 35	= 68 + 0
11	Vs. 11-12	כִּי כִגְבַהַּ שָׁמַיִם עַל־הָאָרֶץ <sup>^</sup>	11	5	5
	Middle verselines:	גָּבַר חֶסְדּוֹ עַל־יְרֵאָיו:		4	4
	22 = 10 + 2 + 10	Total, v. 11	9	= 5 + 4	= 0 + 9
	Meaningful centre	Total, v. 10-11	17	= 9 + 8	= 8 + 9
		Total, v. 2-11	68	= 34 + 34	= 59 + 9
12	Middle words: 82+2+82	כִּרְחֹק מִזְרַח מִמַּעַרְב <sup>^</sup>	12	3	3
	Middle colon:	הִרְחִיק מִמֶּנּוּ אֶת־פְּשָׁעֵינוּ:		4	4
	(23 + 1 + 23)	Total, v. 12	7	= 3 + 4	= 0 + 7
	Strophe 5	Total, v. 11-12	16	= 8 + 8	= 0 + 16
13		כִּרְחֹם אָב עַל־בָּנִים <sup>^</sup>	13	4	4
		רַחֲם יְהוָה עַל־יְרֵאָיו:		4	4
		Total, v. 13	8	= 4 + 4	= 0 + 8
14		כִּי־הוּא יָדַע יִצְרָנוּ <sup>^</sup>	14	4	4
		זְכוּר כִּי־עָפָר אָנֹחֵנוּ:		4	4
		Total, v. 14	8	= 4 + 4	= 0 + 8
	Strophe 6	Total, v. 13-14	16	= 8 + 8	= 0 + 16
	Canticle II.1	Total, v. 11-14	32	= 16 + 16	= 0 + 32
		Total, v. 8-14	53	= 26 + 27	= 21 + 32
		Total, v. 1-14	100	= 49 + 51	= 68 + 32

15	אָנוש פֿחֶצִיר יָמִיוֹ בְּצִיץ הַשָּׂדֶה בֶּן יָצִיץ: Total, v. 15	15	3	3	3	4	4	7	=	3	+	4	=	0	+	7				
16	כִּי רוּחַ עֲבָרָה־בּוֹ וְאִינּוּ וְלֹא־יִכְרְנוּ עוֹד מְקוֹמוֹ: Total, v. 16	16	5	5	5	4	4	9	=	5	+	4	=	0	+	9				
	Strophe 7	Total, v. 15-16	16	=	8	+	8	=	0	+	16	69	=	34	+	35	=	21	+	48
		Total, v. 8-16	69	=	34	+	35	=	21	+	48									
17	וְחֶסֶד יְהוָה מַעֲלָם וְעַד־עוֹלָם עַל־יִרְאָיוֹ וְצִדְקָתוֹ לִבְנֵי בְנִים: Total, v. 17	17	3	3	3	4	4	10	=	7	+	3	=	0	+	10				
		Total, v. 15-17	26	=	15	+	11	=	0	+	26									
18	לְשֹׁמְרֵי בְרִיתוֹ וְלִזְכָּרֵי פִקְדָּיו לַעֲשׂוֹתָם: Total, v. 18	18	2	2	2	3	3	5	=	2	+	3	=	0	+	5				
	Strophe 8	Total, v. 17-18	15	=	9	+	6	=	0	+	15	31	=	17	+	14	=	0	+	31
	Canticle II.2	Total, v. 15-18	31	=	17	+	14	=	0	+	31	63	=	33	+	30	=	0	+	63
	Canto II	Total, v. 11-18	63	=	33	+	30	=	0	+	63	54	=	28	+	26	=	0	+	54
		Total, v. 12-18	54	=	28	+	26	=	0	+	54									
19	יְהוָה בְּשָׁמַיִם הִכִּין פִּסְאָיוֹ וּמַלְכוּתוֹ בְּכָל מַשְׁלָה: Total, v. 19	19	4	4	4	3	3	7	=	4	+	3	=	0	+	7				
		Total, v. 15-19	38	=	21	+	17	=	0	+	38									
20	בָּרְכוּ יְהוָה מְלֹאכָיו וְגִבְרֵי כַח עֲשֵׂי דְבָרוֹ לְשִׁמְעַת בְּקוֹל דְּבָרוֹ: Total, v. 20	20	3	3	3	4	4	10	=	7	+	3	=	0	+	10				
	Strophe 9	Total, v. 19-20	17	=	11	+	6	=	0	+	17									
21	בָּרְכוּ יְהוָה כָּל־צַבָּאִיוֹ מְשִׁרְתָּיו עֲשֵׂי רְצוֹנוֹ: Total, v. 21	21	4	4	4	3	3	7	=	4	+	3	=	0	+	7				
		Total, v. 20-21	17	=	11	+	6	=	0	+	17	55	=	32	+	23	=	0	+	55
		Total, v. 15-21	55	=	32	+	23	=	0	+	55									
22	בָּרְכוּ יְהוָה כָּל־מַעֲשָׂיו בְּכָל־מְקוֹמוֹת מְמִשְׁלָתוֹ בְּרִכֵּי נַפְשֵׁי אֶת־יְהוָה: Total, v. 22	22	4	4	4	3	3	11	=	7	+	4	=	0	+	11				
	Device for inclusion	Total, v. 22	11	=	7	+	4	=	0	+	11	18	=	11	+	7	=	0	+	18
	Compare v. 1a	Strophe 10	18	=	11	+	7	=	0	+	18	35	=	22	+	13	=	0	+	35
		Canto III	35	=	22	+	13	=	0	+	35	98	=	55	+	43	=	0	+	98
		Total, v. 11-22	98	=	55	+	43	=	0	+	98	166	=	88	+	78	=	68	+	98
		Total, v. 1-22	166	=	88	+	78	=	68	+	98	167	=	89	+	78				
	With the heading,	Total, v. 1-22	167	=	89	+	78													

## Observations

1. In terms of the 166 words of the psalm, the arithmetic centre is constituted by the two words in v. 12b, **אֶת־פְּשָׁעֵינוּ**, 'our transgressions' ( $166 = 82 + \boxed{2} + 82$ ). These words are indeed meaningful, but there is a better candidate for meaningful centre. The two middle words happen to fall within the middle colon ( $23 + 1 + 23$ ) in **v. 12b**, and more importantly, also within the middle verselines, **vs. 11-12** ( $10 + 2 + 10$ ), which I consider the consciously designed, most appropriate meaningful centre:

<sup>11</sup> כִּי כִגְבוֹת שָׁמַיִם עַל־הָאָרֶץ ^ גָּבַר חֲסִדּוֹ עַל־יִרְאָיו:  
<sup>12</sup> כִּרְחֹק מִזֶּרֶחַ מִמַּעַרְב ^ הִרְחִיק מִמֶּנּוּ אֶת־פְּשָׁעֵינוּ:

For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him.  
 As far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.

2. In terms of material content, the meaningful centre is positioned in the middle of the poem in still another way: at the crossroads of the words dealing with God's work *on earth* (Column **c**: 1-10), and his work done from his throne *in heaven* (Column **d**: 11-22). See the [General Introduction](#), "Special devices to highlight the meaningful centre".
3. Canto I (**vs. 1-10**), consisting of **68** ( $4 \times 17$ ) words, is significantly demarcated by the poetical structure by means of the two long (**17-word**) verselines at the beginning (1-2) and the 8-word verseline at the end (v. 10), with seven short 6-word lines in between.  
 In the second part, Cantos II and III (**vs. 11-22**), God's heavenly actions are emphasized by the explicit mention of *the heavens* (v. 11a) and God's *heavenly throne* (v. 19a). All this shows that there is no break between vs. 9 and 10, as implied, e.g., by Van der Lugt's analysis. The caesura apparently falls between v. 10 and v. 11.
4. The structural unity of Canticle I.1 (**vs. 1-5**) is underscored by a numerical chiasmus. The same applies to the two components of Canto I (1-10): Canticle I.1 and I.2, tied together by a numerical chiasmus – see the chart.
5. It is of course possible – as in quite a number of cases - to arrange the strophes in a menorah pattern, but it is often doubtful whether such a pattern was really intended by the author. Such patterns may simply be subjective scholarly inventions, if they are not firmly based on natural caesurae in the text. In the case of Psalm 103, a plausible menorah pattern is to be found in terms of the strophic structure:

vs. 1-5	Strophes 1-2	<b>10 cola</b>	} 20	<b>35 words</b>	} <b>68 (4x17)</b>
vs. 6-7	Strophe 3	4 cola		12 words	
vs. 8-10	Strophe 4	6 cola		21 words	
<b>vs. 11-14</b>	<b>Strophes 5-6</b>	<b>8 cola</b>	} 19	<b>32 words</b>	} 66
vs. 15-16	Strophe 7	4 cola		16 words	
vs. 17-18	Strophe 8	5 cola		15 words	
vs. 19-22	Strophes 9-10	<b>10 cola</b>		<b>35 words</b>	

Note that the first and last arms of the menorah have **10 cola** and **35** ( $5 \times 7$ ) words and that the name YHWH occurs altogether 7 times – see Observation 7 below. Moreover, the call to praise in v. 1a and its repetition in v. 22c **בְּרַכֵּי יְהוָה אֱתֵרִי**, 'Bless YHWH, my soul!', functions as a device for enclosure. For a similar device, compare [Psalm 8](#).

Another plausible menorah pattern is to be found in the **7** characteristics of YHWH:

1. 'he forgives all your iniquity' (3a)
2. 'he heals all your diseases' (3b)
3. 'he redeems your life from the pit' (4a)
4. **'he crowns you with steadfast love and mercy' (4b)**
5. 'he satisfies you with good' (5a)
6. 'he has established his throne in the heavens' (19a)
7. 'his kingdom rules over all' (19b).

The number of fullness symbolically signifies the abundance of YHWH's steadfast love and forgiveness, to which is explicitly referred to in the middle of this menorah (v. 4b)! For similar series of **7**, compare in my Analysis of [Psalm 101](#) the second bullet in "Specific features of Psalm 101".

6. The divine name numbers are woven into the text in the following way:

vs. 1-2	<b>17</b> words in total
vs. 1-5	<b>17</b> words before atnach
vs. 2-5	<b>26</b> words in total
vs. 6-10	<b>17</b> words after atnach
vs. 1-10	<b>68</b> (4 x <b>17</b> ) words in total
vs. 2-11	<b>68</b> words with <b>34</b> (2 x <b>17</b> ) before and <b>34</b> (2 x <b>17</b> ) after atnach
vs. 10-11	<b>17</b> words in total
vs. 1-14	<b>51</b> (3 x <b>17</b> ) words after atnach
vs. 8-14	<b>26</b> words before atnach
vs. 8-16	<b>34</b> (2 x <b>17</b> ) words before atnach
vs. 15-17	<b>26</b> words in total
vs. 15-18	<b>17</b> words before atnach
vs. 12-18	<b>26</b> words after atnach
vs. 15-19	<b>17</b> words after atnach
vs. 19-20	<b>17</b> words in total
vs. 15-21	<b>55</b> = <b>32</b> + <b>23</b> – the double <i>kabod</i> formula*
vs. 20-21	<b>17</b> words in total
vs. 1-22	<b>78</b> (3 x <b>26</b> ) words after atnach.

\*The use of the double *kabod* formula, **55** = **32** + **23** (vs. 15-21), may be intentional to symbolically emphasize the universal presence of God.

7. The name יהוה occurs **11** times: altogether **7** times altogether in the opening and concluding call to praise YHWH, Strophes 1-2 (vs. 1-5) and Strophes 9-10 (vs. 19-22): vs. 1a, 2a, 19a, 20a, 21a, 22a, and 22c. It appears **4** times altogether in the motivation for praising YHWH in vs. 6-18 (6a, 8a, 13b, and 17a).

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